

Market, morality and (just) price: the case of recycling economy in Turkey

Article (Accepted Version)

Dinler, Demet Ş (2019) Market, morality and (just) price: the case of recycling economy in Turkey. *Research in Economic Anthropology*, 39. pp. 27-47. ISSN 0190-1281

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**MARKET, MORALITY and (JUST) PRICE:
THE CASE OF THE RECYCLING ECONOMY IN TURKEY**

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ABSTRACT

By drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted amongst waste-pickers and recycling traders in the waste paper, plastic and scrap metal sectors, and engaging with literature from economic anthropology and history, as well as archival sources, this article documents changing perceptions of just price, morality and fairness in the Turkish recycling market. The paper suggests that multiple markets imply multiple prices, which are contingent and contested. When dealing with price mechanisms largely outside their control, actors tend to associate a fair price with the going market price, rather than factors such as state regulation. Approaches to morality and assessments of fairness become more ambiguous when prices are mediated by actors' own practices. These range from gift relations, to paternalism, envy and deception.

Keywords: Market, morality, price, fairness, recycling, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

The Turkish recycling industry has undergone drastic changes since 2004, after the introduction of new waste management regulations in compliance with the European Union Directives for the adoption of the EU *Acquis*¹. These changes were shaped by private and public actors and generated fierce contestation regarding the price of recyclable commodities. Contestation took the form of collective action, with attempts to change state policies in relation to price, playing out through moral discourses about what makes a fair recycling market. These conflicts provide fertile ground to examine the relationship between market, morality and (just) price in the Turkish context. This article uncovers this relationship by investigating various actors involved in the recycling industry who evaluate price and its determinants in complex and contradictory ways. The case study focuses on the capital city of Ankara.

In order to situate the narrative on contestations around price in the Turkish recycling market, it is necessary to explain how market and price are conceptualised, and how this relates to debates in the literature. In the recycling sector, there is no single market or price. Contestations over market, morality and price change accordingly. Firstly, there is a globalised market, which actors experience as impersonal, abstract exchange. In this market the sale price of recyclable goods changes according to global supply and demand, which itself fluctuates depending on various factors - whether or not China reduces imports of waste paper, if a general strike or earthquake hits Chilean copper supplies, or whether flake and fibre produced from recyclable plastic become substitutes for cotton.¹

In the case of scrap metal, the price is specifically indexed to the London Metal Exchange's global reference price for non-ferrous metals. Turkish waste-pickers and traders are conscious of global market forces and interpret price fluctuations by using a market language. They consider these as factors beyond their power, and perceive the price they get when they sell waste as the market price. On any given day, there is a market price for waste-pickers who sell to warehouses, for warehouse owners who then sell to recycling companies, and for recycling company

¹ After the EU officially announced Turkey as a candidate country, on 19 March 2001, Turkey approved the national programme for the adoption of the EU *Acquis*, which defined the principles, priorities and objectives of the accession partnership

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owners who sell on to factories which use the paper, plastic and metal as raw materials in production. At each stage, waste obtains added value. There may be small price differences in this market: existing traders who want to expand their business, or new entrants, may offer price increases to attract waste sellers. But even then, there is an average market price in the first place, which traders use as a reference point when making a better offer.

As will be shown, when the state intervenes to alter the price at which waste-pickers and traders sell, either by direct imposition or through legal regulations, waste-pickers and traders perceive this as unfair and defend the average market price as the just price. The collective repertoire of contestation around price in the Turkish recycling market is different from cases in which a just price is defended against the free market. The historical analysis of E. P. Thompson (1971) on the eighteenth century English crowds' defense of paternalistic regulation of grain prices, James Scott's analysis of peasants' defense of subsistence farming, and contemporary riots claiming just prices against globalised markets (Auyero, 2004; Edelman, 2005; Siméant, 2011) do not apply in the Turkish case. The recycling market actors are closer to those Scholastic thinkers who viewed just price as the market price, as the price a good fetches in the market without any intervention by the state or without any speculative behaviour by merchants (Baldwin, 1959; Monsalve, 2010). This does not imply that there is an ideal market price, which, once severed from all forms of intervention, becomes optimum. Paper factories may collude to set low prices low, or due to a fall in global demand the market price may drop to such a level to threaten waste-pickers' survival or traders' profit margins. But as long as there is no state interference, waste-pickers and traders perceive they have the freedom to change their buyers, alternate between export and domestic markets, shift to recyclable commodities with higher returns, or wait until prices rise again. Their assessments of a just price therefore depend on their bargaining power and agency in markets.

By contrast, there are physical market places where direct, face-to-face relations take place between market participants. These include flea markets where second-hand objects extracted from the garbage are exchanged and local private and public auctions where large amounts of waste paper and scrap metal are sold to traders who offer bids. As will be explained, in the former, the final price is the result of a negotiation between buyers and sellers; in the latter the final price is the result of

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bids offered, which depends on cooperation and competition between participating traders. Since flea markets and auctions give more autonomy to market participants to shape the price formation process, fairness is experienced more as the effect of an individuals' actions, rather than something distorted by global exchange or state intervention.

It would be misleading to reduce the first type of market solely to the realm of the impersonal and abstract, and the second to the realm of the personal and concrete. This distinction is valid as long as one takes into account the experience of market actors and the process of price formation. Yet, when attention is paid to the range of relations between individuals, who interact in so-called impersonal market, we note that there are many dimensions to this market practice which also involves personal relations, moral obligations, trust and gift exchange. These relations assume a number of functions: helping to cope with market uncertainties, establishing long-term relationships for the sustainability of the business, asserting authority in the market community (Buğra, 1998; Lapavitsas, 2004; Elyachar, 2005). Sayer (2004) and Carrier (2018) suggest that these relations should not be thought of as "externally" imposed upon market practices. As soon as individuals enter economic relations, they also enter a set of moral obligations and social relationships; in fact "the production and circulation of things takes place in various activities through which people are related" (Carrier, 2018, p. 28). That is why, although the ontological reduction of the market to a pure commodity exchange between alienated and profit-maximising individuals, as defended by neoclassical economics, is refuted, the substantivist model of the market as embedded in social relations and institutions has to be qualified. Economic and social relations are not two separate spheres, wherein the latter sustains the former. Similarly, Barbara Harriss-White (2014) argues that markets are themselves "political and social constructs whose performance is affected and changed by whose performance is affected and continually changed by relations of authority that are established outside the economy and act both inside and outside it."

There is extensive literature on the constitutive role of kinship, trust, gifts and moral relations in markets; what is less debated is the fragile and ambivalent nature of these relations. Yet, deception may be as common as trust; there is no guarantee that moral obligations will last or that their violation can not be compensated. In the Turkish recycling market, whereas deception, guile, opportunism are present even

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among recycling traders from the same kin groups; trust, promises and informal agreements may often be broken, which has an influence on economic relations and the price of recyclable commodities. As studies suggest, the boundaries between the moral and immoral become blurred when rule-breaking is considered to show resourcefulness and astuteness in order to survive, or achieve success in the market (see Gerschlanger, 2001; Browne, 2009). In the Turkish recycling market, whether deceptive behaviour is positively associated with a survival imperative or clever trading, or negatively associated with unacceptable, immoral acts which harm others, cannot be determined in advance, but changes according to context.

After introducing the main features of waste management regulations and the actors in the recycling industry, the article describes the means through which the state influences prices (direct violence, implicit or explicit support of certain companies over others, and trading restrictions) and how market actors react to these policies. It further investigates the effect of global exchanges on local actors. In these cases price determinants are experienced as exogenous factors which are difficult, if not impossible, to alter. Next, the article focusses on local auctions, secondary markets and one-to-one relations between economic actors in order to reveal how gift, trust, envy and deception regulate their behaviour and influence local prices. In these cases price has additional determinants, stemming from local actors' own actions, interventions and interactions. Thus, moral evaluations about the market become more ambiguous than those made vis-a-vis the state and global exchange. The paper concludes with insights into the contested, context-specific nature of both price formation and perceptions of fairness in the recycling market.

The findings are based on data collected during ethnographic fieldwork, which took place between May and October 2007, in December 2007 and June to October 2008. A revisit was made in the summer of 2009. Archival research covers the period from 2007 to 2014. Some key informants were re-interviewed and data updated during 2014. The research sites include streets and warehouses where waste-pickers work, the neighbourhoods in which they live, and the neighbourhood where traders' companies are located.²

REGULATIONS AND ACTORS IN THE TURKISH RECYCLING SECTOR

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The By-Law on the Control of Waste Packaging has retained the same core principles, despite several amendments (in 2007, 2011 and 2017), since 2004.³ Regulations define all legal entities producing waste as “waste producers”, and assign responsibility to them for officially declaring, sorting and managing their waste before collection by private providers. The law sets the criteria (physical size, category of employees, type of equipment) that recycling facilities must meet in order to be granted environmental licenses, which are allocated by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization (*Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı*). Two of these licenses are pertinent to this paper: the license for collecting and sorting waste facilities (the TAT license) and the license for recycling waste facilities (the GDT license). TAT license holders sign contracts with municipal authorities in specific jurisdictions, and have the right to collect, sort, press and sell waste to the GDT license holders. In the article I specifically deal with three different sets of actors in the Turkish recycling industry. First, GDT licensed paper factories, which buy waste paper from TAT licensed companies. They are of interest because they had a major conflict over price. Second, scrap metal companies which sell scrap to large metal factories as raw materials and must apply for a license to process scrap metal.⁴ Third, companies holding a collecting license for waste paper and plastic.

Informal waste-pickers constitute a major source of waste supply. Forced migration, neoliberal agricultural reforms eliminating subsidies, the privatization of agricultural enterprises, as well as poverty and a lack of formal jobs in industry, has led many of the rural and urban poor to undertake waste-picking as an essential or secondary work since the 1990s. A typical waste-picker has a carrier, which is a manual freight trolley made up of two rollers with two handles, to carry the waste he or she collects from public and private bins while walking the urban streets during eight or nine hour shifts. This waste is then transported to a warehouse. A warehouse can be an informal storage space specifically used for waste transactions, or a converted ex-auto repair shop, or squatter housing. Although new waste management regulations envisaged eliminating informal waste-picking, the lack of infrastructural capacity of recycling companies, coupled with the challenges of surveillance of public bins by privatized companies employing wage-labour made reducing reliance on informal waste-picking difficult. Since waste-picking responded to the problem of unemployment, it was not desirable for the government to eliminate it. In this article, I use the case of two Kurdish waste-picking communities

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which became involved in a major conflict with two TAT licensed companies and the municipal authorities. The first community came from the city of Hakkari to settle in the Türközü neighbourhood of Ankara as a result of forced migration. Waste-pickers in this community are labourers who pool their family income and each family unit sells the waste on its own account to TAT license holders. The second community lives in a deserted industrial neighbourhood called İskitler, where a group of petty capitalists came from the town of Siverek, in the city of Urfa and hired warehouses and seasonal migrant wage-labour by mobilising their kinship networks. These waste-pickers work and live in the warehouse.

To understand contestations with respect to price, the role of state institutions is crucial. Responsible for designing waste management plans and signing contracts with license holders, municipal authorities can use their authority to selectively enact the By-Laws in favor of certain recycling companies over others, and this has serious implications for conflicts over price. The role of the Ministry of Economy (*Ekonomi Bakanlığı*) should also be underlined, because, as will be explained, its capacity to control international trade for recyclable commodities is used by GDT license holders as a means to control local waste paper prices.

THE STATE, GLOBAL EXCHANGES AND PRICE

This section examines the influence of the state and global markets on the price of recyclable commodities in Turkey. More specifically, it investigates the conflict between waste-pickers and two large recycling companies mediated by local government, and the conflict between collecting license holders and recycling license holders mediated by state institutions. In both cases, the perception of actors regarding fairness is similar. Against state intervention which favours certain companies, for them the just price is the market price. The section also describes how market actors in the scrap metal sector perceive the London Metal Exchange as a force over which they have little power.

Waste-pickers, Municipal Governments and Just Price

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On the first day of fieldwork in 2007, my visit to a recycling warehouse with the leading organiser of the Waste-Pickers' Association was interrupted by a telephone call, which led to us rushing to hospital to visit a waste-picker who had brain concussion after being severely beaten up by municipal police. This was only the most recent incident in a series of conflicts between waste-pickers and the municipal government. Most wastepickers who worked in the city centre where initial conflicts took place, came from a tribal community that had settled in Türközü neighbourhood after they were forced to leave their village in Hakkari in 1994. In the absence of employment opportunities, fathers and elder sons from approximately 120 families started collecting waste. They allocated public bins in the city center to each family according to a system of customary rights, and stored the waste in the warehouses they had built in their neighbourhood. When the municipal police attempted to demolish these warehouses waste-pickers responded with collective rage by burning their own warehouses. Conflicts escalated when municipal police made routine stops of wastepickers, and asked them to sell their waste exclusively and at low prices to a new company called ITC. This multinational had leased the management of Mamak recycling facilities (as part of Mamak Landfill Waste Management Project) for 49 years from the metropolitan municipality, and had invested in the building of a giant recycling facility. Waste-pickers preferred to sell their waste to other recycling companies offering the current market price. Their refusal to comply with demands led the municipal police to confiscate waste-pickers' trolleys and all the waste collected during the day. In order to terminate conflicts, waste-pickers secured an informal deal in which they committed to selling part of their waste to ITC on certain days of the week. Yet in 2007 they again faced similar pressures from Çankaya district municipality, which had signed a contract with a recycling company called SIMAT. Conflicts spread to other neighbourhoods, especially İskitler, where the metropolitan municipal administration wanted to repossess occupied warehouses, due to plans for an urban regeneration project.⁵

The Waste-Pickers' Association changed the form of protests from spontaneous outbursts and individual resistance to more organised and publicly visible demonstrations, bringing together waste-pickers from Türközü, İskitler and other neighbourhoods. In 2009, Çankaya Municipality made an agreement with the Waste-Pickers' Association not to interfere with waste-pickers' right to work as long as they abided by certain rules of conduct.⁶

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While defending their right to collect waste from public bins in the street, waste-pickers argue that it was the state's responsibility to create jobs for waste-pickers, who, if offered better opportunities, would never choose to work with garbage. The moral obligation of the state to create jobs for the unemployed and the poor resonated with the repertoire of a moral economy. But when the issue is price, they do not expect a fair price to be set for the recyclable commodities they sold, or for food they bought in the market, as would be the case in the discourse of moral economy. Their understanding of fairness adopted the term "fair competition", as expressed in an article published in the waste-pickers' magazine, *Katık*. This is more similar to those Scholastic thinkers who believed that a just price equated to the current market price; the price a good fetched in a sale. In their view, price fluctuations are normal if the demand for, or supply of a good, changes. Traders, according to this, perform a natural duty when they contribute to the exchange of goods in society (Monsalve, 2010). Like those Medieval thinkers such as Cantor who is concerned about the official estimator appointed to buy provisions for the royal household and set the price for goods he purchases (Baldwin, 1959: 70), waste-pickers think that neither the municipal administration nor private companies have the right to set the price of waste.

This understanding of price differs from Colombian farmers' discourse as depicted by Gudeman and Rivera (1990). For Colombian farmers trade is good as long as it establishes a house's ability to sustain itself, but a deliberately set just price or fair trade (which did not always equate to market price) is necessary to maintain the house. When asked about the issue of fairness with respect to the actual sale price, waste-pickers in Turkey respond that it is legitimate for recycling factories to make profit from the waste they buy since they make investments, plan long-term, and spend capital. Some, who consider themselves wage-labourers working in their brother/relative's warehouse, anticipate making such investments themselves: opening a warehouse, hiring wage-labour, or buying a small van to work in the transport business. Their views about price fluctuations reflect their familiarity and acceptance of market language. A waste-picker said that prices fell when there was a large amount of imported paper (which he observed in Istanbul, while he walked by the port areas with large container ships). He thought scrap metal prices went up when there was a boom in the construction industry, which he would understand by

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observing the actual construction activities while walking in the city to collect scrap metal.⁷

The legitimacy of the market in economic life does not preclude moral duties. In Türközü, elder sons submit the money they get from the sale of waste directly to their fathers without keeping any for personal expenditure. Reproduction of the tribal community is a primary duty. Families collect a considerable amount of money for funerals and weddings to support each other. During the summer periods, young children from village communities with which Türközü members have kinship ties come to work as waste-pickers. They are allocated special spots in the streets to work in order to generate income. Customary rights to work over garbage are thus extended to close kin. One could argue that Türközü community resembles Merina, as depicted by Bloch (1989), for whom exchange relations are important, yet not superior to the domestic domain, and morally acceptable as long as they support kinship duties. Accordingly, many Türközü families would have expanded their businesses, had the municipal government not demolished their warehouses. An essential difference between Merina and Türközü, on the other hand, is that for Merina it is the eternal ancestors who organise community life rather than Money. Thus, individual property has to be alienated before death. In Türközü, families make plans to invest in property on behalf of elder sons, especially in real estate in affordable areas of the city. In İskitler community, warehouse owners' moral obligations are less strict. They give advance money to waste-pickers whenever they asked, for instance in cases of emergency to support a family member. But this does not inhibit the explicit purpose of petty capitalist warehouse owners, which is to accumulate capital by hiring kin as wage-labourers.

The political economy of the recycling economy in the warehouses offers at least one explanation for why market price is considered to be legitimate by Turkish waste-pickers. Although at first glance most waste-pickers appear to have simple livelihood strategies, more complex class relations underpin the informal economy of recycling. Many waste-pickers are long-term wage-labourers who have worked in other segments of the informal labour market.⁸ They are dependent on work in warehouses and factories. This ties them to warehouse owners, who, as petty capitalists, are in turn dependent on access to wage-labour. While owners seek to expand, significant constraints on accumulation and competition make this possible for a very limited number of individuals. For instance, although warehouse owners

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have less market power than traders, a warehouse owner who hires significant wage-labour may increase his supply of recycling materials and with it his or her bargaining power, and secure a price increase when traders are aggressively seeking to expand their waste supply. This points to the warehouse owners' capacity to intervene in and negotiate the market sphere, rather than being simply a passive recipient of a given market price. Consequently, in the informal economy, we see that wage laborers, petty capitalists and traders have long been integrated into a complex network of relations in the market economy operating out of warehouses and recycling factories.

Even if tribal, kinship and family obligations restrict to different degrees where to spend the money earned for some communities, they do not prohibit or consider morally suspicious wage-labour, profit, property or accumulation.⁹ Hence, they question attempts by the state to interfere in the market by favouring certain companies, but not the market itself. Waste-pickers know that the market is constituted by power relations due to the unequal distribution of ownership and control over resources as observed by Marx (1887/1990) and Weber (see Holton and Turner, 1989, pp. 180-181), yet, in pragmatic terms, a market with more competition, in which they can choose between buyers is preferred over an oligopolistic market in which a small group of companies set the price.

Collecting License Holders, Recycling License Holders and Price

Waste-pickers were not the only ones who were furious at the state's interference in the market price. Companies which held a collecting license were not happy that waste-pickers were forced to sell to ITC, since they were an important source of waste supply. But their frustration had more complex roots. They were also discontent with the price at which they sold waste paper to the recycling license holders which used their waste paper as a raw material. In their view, the owners of these factories colluded to fix waste paper prices and distorted the market price.

A policy implemented by the Ministry of Economy in 2011 triggered a dispute between TAT license holders and paper factories which held a GDT license. The incidents which followed it provided strong evidence of collusive behaviour. On 21 April 2011, The Official Gazette published an official communiqué¹⁰ in which the Ministry of Economy imposed the condition that waste paper exporters (who were

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TAT licensees) should secure permission to export from at least three companies that used waste paper as an input (which were GDT licensees). For TAT licensees to be able to export, these companies should officially declare that they did not need the exported waste paper.

This decision was allegedly due to the lobbying activities of GDT licensee paper factories. Why would paper factories promote such a policy? The answer should be sought in the political economy of the local and global recycling economy. From 2008 to 2010 waste paper prices had fallen, because China had reduced imports of waste paper and European companies had attempted to sell their stocks by exporting large quantities of waste paper to Turkey. This made imports more price attractive. TAT licensed companies, which already had large stocks of waste paper, had entered a difficult situation. From 2010 onwards, international prices gradually recovered with rising global aggregate demand for waste paper. But local prices were still very low due to the alleged collusion between GDT licensee companies. Therefore TAT licensed companies found it more profitable to sell to export markets. The official communiqué restrained the freedom of trade for TAT license holders by making it conditional on the permission of GDT licensed companies which had vested interests in this restriction. Whereas the Foundation of the Cellulose and Paper Industry (which represented GDT license holders) defended this policy by arguing that the export of waste paper was harmful to the local industry, since imported waste paper was expensive due to high global demand.¹¹ TAT license holders counter-argued that this decision was a deliberate manoeuvre by paper factories to reduce the price of waste paper in the domestic market.

The Competition Authority launched an investigation in the same year, after an official complaint, to find out whether nine GDT license holders had colluded in their common interest and violated Competition Law. After having evaluated evidence of meetings and e-mail exchanges which clearly supported the allegation that GDT license holders acted together to restrict the exports of TAT license holders, on 8 July 2013, the Competition Authority made the decision that the actions of the companies were evidence of collusion and thus a violation of Article 4 of the Competition Law, yet the implementation of the Communiqué would be legal until 2014, giving exemption to companies from charges for violation for a period of three years.¹²

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In June 2014, a business association called TUDAM, whose members included TAT license holders, publicly announced that exports of waste paper should be unconditional; “the prices should be determined according to the rules of the economy, not by such interventions. When demand declines in the domestic market, we should not be prevented from exporting paper.” (Çardak, 2014). However, export restrictions remained. Similar to the defense of market price by waste-pickers against state intervention, TAT license holders promoted market rules and market prices against unfair state intervention.

Scrap Metal Companies, The London Metal Exchange, and Fairness

For companies which specialise in scrap metal, the source of unfairness lies elsewhere. The scrap metal market is indexed to the London Metal Exchange (LME). Although at the time of fieldwork no scrap metal contracts were traded at the LME, trade in non-ferrous metals still set prices for the scrap version of these metals. In comparison to waste paper where the role of the state and paper factories is significant, LME prices are excluded from state intervention and metal companies which buy scrap from scrap traders also use the LME price. In that sense nobody seemed to contest the validity of the LME price.

Problems occurred in times of drastic and unpredicted price falls in the global market. “We do the *real* work, the trade, the toil. They do the *fictitious* trade and they are the ones who decide on the price,” a partner in a scrap metal company told me, while looking at the screen of the London Metal Exchange website. It was July 2008, and after a long period of steadily soaring prices, aluminium prices suddenly plummeted, provoking frustration among traders. While keeping his scrap-metal stockpiled in the hope that prices would rise, the owner of a scrap metal company grumbled, while looking at the LME website on his computer: “look, we have become the *puppet* of a *machine*.” This tension between a governing machine and its puppet was more than metaphorical expression. It referred to a real experience by the traders who had little say or power in determining the prices in the global market.

The owner of a scrap metal company was in a difficult position because he had been conned by a trader who had bought very large volumes of scrap metal and had not paid. He had taken credit from the bank but was finding it difficult to make

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regular payments. Yet, he was still luckier than many other small scrap traders since he had inherited a large factory with his brother and was still able to keep aluminium in stock.

A group of small traders and myself were sitting in a circle reflecting on how people had been thrilled by the exceptional rise in aluminium prices over a long period and not considered the possibility of a sudden fall. When asked whether they could retain aluminium in stock until prices rose again, the owner of a small scrap metal shop replied, “we can’t do that”. He went on to compare his situation to large wealthy traders: “if I waited, I would die of pain.” Asymmetrical power relations between scrap traders created unfairness. Resilience of scrap trading companies in response to price volatility depended on their size. **Small traders could not get a just price because their ability to withhold stock was limited.**

Another trader who had recently invested in a scrap press machine to expand his business disagreed with his fellow traders. It was frustrating to witness drastic price falls, and he himself was struggling to pay his bank loan. But he believed that the LME prices could be predictable as well, if one knew better how the Exchange operated, and what factors influenced the price. This was exceptional, though, to many scrap traders the LME price was an opaque arena they could not understand or act upon.¹³

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, MORALITY AND PRICE

In this section, I examine situations in which prices are influenced more directly by inter-subjective relations: negotiations, interactions and tensions between individual actors. This happens when waste-pickers sell second hand objects in a flea market, when traders cooperate or break agreements while making bids in local scrap auctions, and when traders share or steal customers from fellow traders. Behaviour in these three cases is motivated by positive emotions of paternalism, the desire to show generosity, as well as negative emotions of envy and grudge. In contrast to the previous examples, where actors have a more unified view of fairness (market price provides a fair price unlike state intervention), in these cases what constitutes fairness is more ambiguous because the actors who interpret the market, its morality and fairness, observe how their own actions influence prices.

The Flea Market, The Container Market, and Price

Although waste-pickers are integrated into the formal recycling market via their informal activities and defend an average market price, this market price fluctuates and sometimes falls drastically. In this context, waste-pickers do not use the language of moral economy; they respond by various economic strategies from within the recycling market. Samson (2017) explains how reclaimers in a Soweto garbage dump use various strategies to cope with falling prices, but not collective struggle to negotiate with buyers for higher prices¹⁴; they sell assets, take on debt, reduce expenditure, intensify labour, diversify the recyclables they collect, and sell in informal secondary markets instead of the collapsing formal recycling market. Diversification of or alternation between various recyclables when economic crisis hits the price of recyclable commodities are also strategies in Millar's (2015) study of a Brazilian garbage dump. Similarly, in Turkey, waste-pickers are influenced by price to stop collecting some types of recyclable goods and collect others instead, they increase their working hours, and they sell objects in the informal flea market to supplement their income. Migrant pickers may also choose to do construction or agricultural work, depending on the season.

The flea market, which offers a supplementary income to waste-pickers is different from the recycling market where waste paper, plastic and metal are homogenised into average market prices. Price tags in the flea market are multiple, heterogeneous and open to negotiation. In contrast to the secondary market in Cali, Colombia where waste-pickers sold cutlery, jewellery, shoes and clothes to second-hand dealers (Birkbeck, 1978: 1174), waste-pickers turn into second-hand dealers themselves. Poorly furnished, the flea market does not have any of the stalls one usually sees in typical local markets for grocery and clothing. Second-hand clothes, books, and an assortment of bizarre-looking objects found by waste-pickers in the garbage are displayed on large old rags on the floor. Waste-pickers do not know which of the objects they find in the garbage are worth selling and will attract customers. Interaction with the bazaar visitors is a learning curve for them to understand which objects attract customers. Once visitors show interest in a specific product, for instance printer ink boxes, waste-pickers become more attentive in searching them out in the garbage. Waste-pickers then get regular customers who

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knew that they can find what they are looking for at their stall. In line with the argument that things move between different states in their long and complex biography (Araujo, 2007), the life of objects which are homogenised by commodification is now “appropriated by consumers, revived and individuated (Sherry, 1990, p. 196) in the flea market.

There is no formal market price in the bazaar; there are various prices which change, depending on the unique relationship between visitors and sellers. The initial price is not the actual sale price, but it sets the terms for bargaining. In contrast to recyclable commodities sold to factories, waste-pickers have some power over this negotiated price, but so do the customers. If there is more than one person selling the same object, a common estimation can be made to secure a fair deal by comparing prices, and it is legitimate for the buyer to offer this comparison in order to reduce a price, as long as they are willing to spend enough time in the bazaar to gain market information. A fair market price would be that negotiated in each transaction between the buyer and the seller.

There remains one final market in which waste-pickers operate, the so-called container market. I owe my first encounter with the container market to a joke made by young waste-pickers while I was spending time at one of the warehouses in İskitler. Eyüp, whom I had accompanied on his waste-collection rounds, was wearing a nice white shirt and a silver-coloured necklace. I complimented him on the necklace, knowing that waste-pickers felt ashamed of their dirty work clothes and had little opportunity to wear clean, nice-looking clothes except on a Sunday trip to the city centre. Eyüp’s cousins and brothers laughed: “He got it from the container market.”¹⁵ I did not understand, and thought there was a market called Container, which made them laugh even more. I later figured out that when waste-pickers found accessories, clothes, and other objects in the garbage which they could use for themselves, they said that they got it from the container market. All containers holding garbage in the city constitute a kind of ‘shop’, which offer free objects to those who take time to search for them. The container market is based on a diversity of products rather than homogeneity; it relies on the value waste-pickers attach to them. Since waste-pickers have limited income to spend, the container market enables waste-pickers to have access to goods for free.

Finding beautiful objects imply labour and care in waste-pickers’ work and they show pride in offering these objects as gifts. A young waste-picker, who

remained silent during a long period of my fieldwork and refused to talk, touched my shoulders gently one day and put a red necklace into my hands. The owner of a warehouse relying on family labour, who found me eager to listen to his thoughts on life and politics, gave me a small decorative teapot made of copper that he had carefully separated and cleaned from among other objects. Such gifts are signs of being accepted into the waste-picking community. When I appreciated them, I acknowledged the value people attached to me. When working in the garbage is not a matter of pride, but shame, the source of gifts is hidden from recipients. Objects still do not have a price tag, but are presumed to have been paid for. A father of three children who came to work in Ankara bought colorful wrapping paper to prepare gift packages for the toys he had collected from the garbage and washed. He would soon go home to another city for the Eid holiday and wanted his children to be happy.

Gifts are not random remnants from the garbage. Among all the different objects waste-pickers come across, specific things are selected, cleaned and prepared as presents for individuals they care about. Gifts enable waste-pickers to show that despite their poverty they can still control and use resources (the garbage) to exhibit emotions such as gratitude to visitors or fatherly affection for children. Their emotions of friendship and fatherhood are thus mediated by gifts generated from their work in the garbage.

From Gift Exchange to Envy and Deception

In the trading zone where my scrap trader informants are located, I expected kinship, trust and gifts to sustain market relations in line with existing ethnographic and historical literature. Longstanding and corporate relations were key to the creation of the American electricity industry (Granovetter and McGuire, 2002), political allegiances and ethnic identities were central to the formation of London Stock market (Carruthers, 1994, p. 16), senior traders' attempts to coerce, cajole and plead with other traders allowed the expansion of financial instruments at the Chicago Board of Trade (McKenzie, 2006, p. 155), and family ties and kinship underpinned the development of local markets in India (Harriss-White, 2005). In fact, in the initial stages of their business, traders who had kinship connections had built a construction cooperative. By benefitting from bank credit and sharing administrative costs, these traders could build and sustain their recycling facilities.

Many of the economic relations are mediated by kinship, but even when this is not the case, for example when new companies arrive, relationships take on the affective and gifting form associated with kinship. I was sitting in the office of Vahit, the owner of a waste paper company, when a trader walked in to discuss a financial problem. The deadline for the next instalment for a new house he had bought was approaching and he found himself in unexpected financial distress. What Vahit offered to his fellow trader was not a cash loan, but a profitable contract with a customer whose waste paper he could convert into cash. Vahit's business was going well in those days and he did not need to buy waste paper from this customer. His fellow trader could buy and sell the waste paper and pay his mortgage instalment with the profit.

Customer sharing is not uncommon among neighbouring traders in such industrial areas. Elyachar (2005, pp. 154-155) talks about the frequency of customer sharing as standard practice among workshop masters in Cairo. Careful track of those exchanges was kept, and the expectation that such behaviour would be reciprocated shows calculation and a profit motive. Sharing with commission, which occurred when, for example, a blacksmith who already had enough work sent a customer to another, was closest to classic market exchange, whereas an exchange without commission could be considered as a combination of gift and market exchange. As Elyachar argues, in contemporary markets differentiating gifts from self-interest is misplaced since they are very much intertwined.

Gifts may embody a desire to reinforce one's own authority and prestige. Mahmut, the owner of a waste-plastic company, took on the representative of a new investor as his protégé. The new company, whose original operations were in the south of Turkey, had recently invested in recycling after calculating that profitability in the sector was increasing. The new company appointed a young officer called Ferhat, who was responsible for finding waste sellers from several warehouses throughout Ankara. Mahmut liked this young man and introduced him to people in his networks and shared market information with him. Such favours were a sign of Mahmut's authority in the trading community, introducing a dimension Mauss (1924/1990, p. 95) attributed to the gift relation: "to give is to show one's superiority, to be more, to be higher in the rank, magister", or what Sahlins (1972: 208) called "calculated generosity".

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Ethnographic observations often illuminate most when they reveal contradictory behaviour by the same subject in different contexts. Mahmut refused to show Recai the paternalistic attitude he had shown to Ferhat. Recai had recently opened a new plastic recycling facility despite very limited capital, and he struggled to pay traders who sold him their plastic. While I sat in Recai's office, he lied on the phone to a trader who had sent a large amount of plastic to his factory. "The driver is on his way, you will get your money soon", he said, but as he spoke, the company driver was sitting in front of me, waiting for his payment. "In this business, you have to lie. I mean, I have to lie. Look at this." He showed me unpaid invoices and explained he lacked cash to pay them. According to Mahmut, Recai did not have the capacity to compete. "I offered to buy Recai's plastic in cash, his whole business is just one day's trade for me, you know, but he refused... You have to lean your back against someone", said Mahmut.

Vahit, who as we saw was generous in sharing his customer with a fellow trader, was criticised by other traders for offering exceptionally high prices and adopting strategies to steal other traders' regular customers. "I do not understand how he is able to make money when he sells above the market price", said İrfan, the owner of a waste paper company. "He also offered 170,000 Turkish lira to a printing company I worked with for years in order to regularly buy their waste paper", he added with a frustrated expression. İrfan explained that in the past, since there was a limited number of recycling companies, he was able to convince others to fix a sale price to mitigate risks of competition. Cooperation seemed to be in the best interests of all. The globalisation of the recycling industry, changing waste management regulations, and the entry of new market players made it difficult to maintain such cooperative behaviour.

If traders' behavioural repertoires shifted across the continuum between gift exchange and utility maximisation, one could argue that they selectively used this repertoire by investing in gifts for future personal benefit, offering gifts in exchange for prestige and authority, or prioritising personal gain at the expense of others' losses. The latter was especially dangerous for traders, because in its extreme form it destabilised the price range traders were prepared to pay for waste. More often, however, price differences offered by factories were much smaller since they could not afford to pay high prices or raise the market price, but these differences still affected decisions on whom to sell to. **Warehouse owners** might even change their

long-term buyers due to these differences. “You would not believe how with very small price increases we can get people on our side.” said Ferhat while talking about his trading strategies. “But you should also know how to speak to different people, even your way of smoking and talking should change depending on the person you talk to.” Orhan, a warehouse owner confirmed his decision to shift to Ferhat’s company: “he (Ferhat) has a sweet tongue.”

Some practices do not easily fit within this utility/gift continuum, and this has, in turn, implications for price and the competitiveness of individual traders. The first of these practices is related to Scrap Auctions. Auctions can be organised by private and public institutions (including Ministries and provincial administrations) and they are advertised in newspapers. There may be, for instance, a waste paper auction by a public institution to liquidate their stock of unused paper products. Another example is the demolition of a public prison, which generates substantial quantities of scrap metal.

Although I did not have a chance to visit an Auction myself (despite my repeated requests to be taken), stories told about Scrap Auctions corroborate a pattern. In certain auctions, some individuals deliberately raise bids to increase competition and prices. This is the case with open auctions. More interestingly, is the case of a trader who is a close relative of an eager bidder raising the price deliberately, sometimes above the average sale price, just to make sure that the latter does not win. By offering a very high price a bidder might even undermine his own economic interests. The reason behind such behaviour is explained as a “grudge” emerging from a dispute, or “envy”. It is equally possible for traders to make a deal prior to an auction, and the winner share the scrap with the trader(s) he has made the pact with. In such cases, post-auction disputes might emerge about terms and conditions of respective shares. The results of cooperation or tensions are therefore unpredictable. Previous agreements may well turn into aggressive competition and deceit, or vice versa.¹⁶ This makes the auction sale price unpredictable, as it can change according to the number of participants, and depend on the fluid and inter-personal relations between traders.

Envy and grudges motivate other forms of action. In one case, two companies allegedly filed official complaints to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization about a group of recycling companies violating their license obligations, including the buying of waste from informal waste-pickers, although this was common

practice. Investigations led to significant fines for the companies and had an effect on their competitiveness. Such behaviour resonates with Castellanos' (2012) case study from Colombia, where envy is found to be a major emotion regulating the symbolic universe of local pottery makers, who filed several complaints and even lawsuits to public authorities regarding misconduct or unpaid debts.

In the literature on the evil eye, envy is considered to emerge from a context in which goods are limited and one's wealth is at the expense of another's loss, which leads to competitive, evasive, or concealing behaviour (Foster, 1972). Fear of the evil eye (Gosh, 1983; Gershman, 2014) reflects destructive fear of envy, discourages wealth accumulation and regulates social behaviour. In contemporary markets, the case of Egyptian workshop masters (Elyachar, 2005) or Mongolian miners (High, 2008) indicate continuities between such fear and its economic implications. Do similar negative feedback mechanisms regulate traders' behaviour?

Wealth accumulation is not discouraged in the Turkish case. On the contrary, it is praised. Yet, traders have views about which emotion and behaviour is morally acceptable or not, while making profits. "If one thinks only about his own profit, he cannot make profit himself in the end", said Ercan, the owner of a plastic recycling factory, referring to what he considered greedy traders. Soon after that, he took a self-critical stance: "... partners in X company had fought and were about to dissolve their partnership. Due to the tension and dispute, no one was at the factory. Their customers did not know and had **unloaded** all the plastic and needed to get their money. We saw that and we bought the waste cheaply... Although it was worth more. What we did was sort of... opportunism."

A minor intermediary dealer was famous for stealing regular yet small amounts of money from the people he worked with. This was considered as legitimate because he also made his bosses a lot of money, using his social skills, social networks, and ability to enact various performances in order to make good deals for waste supply. "You have to ignore petty cheating if someone earns you money", said a warehouse owner while talking about this dealer. In another case, a son had stolen all the scrap metal from his father's yard late one evening. According to the traders who knew that the person responsible was the son, what he did was wrong, but he had no choice because the father had been stingy and unfair, not giving his son any money although he worked hard for his father. However, if a new trader is thought to make his profit by trading stolen scrap, this is considered as creating unfair

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competition and tarnishing the reputation of all traders. Whether deceptive behaviour can be accepted or condemned is not determined in advance, but changes according to context.¹⁷

Traders do not only respond to external pressures such as price movements, changing supply and demand or state regulations, but each other's behaviours, everyday interactions and associated emotions, which has, in turn, important economic (and not always rational in terms of self-interest) consequences. Kinship and personal relations between traders may turn from positive resources for reciprocity into domains to express envy, grudge or revenge.¹⁸ This also makes trust significant, and all traders I talked to emphasised this as the main regulative principle of trade, yet its significance seems to come more from its scarcity and fragility rather than its abundance.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Unlike historical and contemporary struggles claiming a just price against unregulated or free markets, contestations over price in the Turkish recycling sector did not generate claims for justice against the abstract market price. One reason for this is that market forces are not perceived to threaten the survival of those who do not have market power, since waste-pickers and warehouse owners have been integrated into the informal market economies via various shifting occupations (construction, agriculture, textile) before and alongside waste-picking.

Experience of fairness with respect to price changes according to the type of market in which one operates and to determinants of price. In the globalised market for waste paper, plastic and scrap metal, the average sale price of recyclable commodities is experienced as an abstract force, yet the source of the problem lies in companies which want to increase their market share. It is state instruments (by-laws, official communiqués or physical violence) which materialise vested interests. These regulations are perceived as infringing upon the market participants' right to freely choose their buyers. Thus, fair competition means withdrawal of the state from the market sphere, and the just price is the actual sale price.

In the case of scrap metal, the London Metal Exchange is blamed when prices fall drastically and scrap traders incur losses. During times of stability, the LME prices are accepted as more legitimate compared to the situation in waste paper, where

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paper companies and the state use their power to control the market price. But in times of crisis, traders feel it unfair that they do all the hard work and a group of people in the Exchange decide how much the efforts of traders are worth. The extent to which actors cope with these market imbalances depends on their relative bargaining power; large traders can keep scrap metal in their stocks until prices rise again whereas smaller ones cannot.

When price is the by-product of or is influenced by more direct interactions than global exchange and the state, the experience of fairness in relation to price has its own dynamic; in the flea market, price is negotiated between buyers and sellers. Auction sale prices change depending on the number and motivation of participants, and whether there is cooperation or fierce competition between traders. It may be then more appropriate to talk about “multiple markets”²⁰ whose shape, and configurations of power between actors, influence the final price and assessments about justice.

Both waste-pickers and traders have their own conceptualisation of what is moral or immoral behaviour in the market. It is immoral for the state to “play with the bread” of waste-pickers and it was the state’s moral duty to “find jobs” for them if informal waste-picking is to be prohibited. But hiring wage-labour, making profit, and expanding one’s business are not immoral. For traders, buying cheaply in the market is acceptable as clever opportunism, but thinking solely of one’s own profit and being too greedy can be dangerous. One should give money or tolerate small illicit gains. It is important to help those who recognise one’s authority, but legitimate to ignore those who do not. It is also difficult to make clear cut judgements about traders’ behaviour, since what may appear to be wrong and immoral may be justified from a different angle or when circumstances change. The same actors may be involved in contradictory actions in the market; pursuing competitive ambitions, perhaps motivated by envy on the one hand, yet displaying generosity and fulfilling moral obligations on the other.

These insights indicate the contested and contingent nature of market price and fairness, depending on the shifting strategies of actors, their relative bargaining power and their mutual interactions.

Acknowledgements

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The author is grateful to Peter Luetchford, two anonymous reviewers for insightful comments, criticisms and suggestions, which helped to improve the article and Giovanni Orlando for excellent editorial guidance. The research was funded by an ORSAS Award (2005-2008) granted by the HEFCE.

¹ Until 2004, before the privatisation of the paper industry and closing down of state conomic enterprises and factories in the cellulose sector, the state maintained a regulative role in controlling domestic market prices for paper and waste paper.

² The names of all informants have been changed for anonymity.

³ Official Gazette 27th December, 2017, no 30283.

⁴ By-Law on The Recycling of Certain non-Hazardous Wastes, Official Gazette, 17th June, 2011, no 27967.

⁵ The project was only implemented in Autumn 2017, and several warehouses were demolished by the municipal government.

⁶ The Waste-Pickers' Association in Turkey carried out a public advocacy campaign to defend the right to work without being subject to violence in the streets, and the same rights to health and legal recognition that waste-pickers in South America have, as recognized and authorised service providers. For Colombia, see Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes (2010), and for Brazil, see Dias (2012). Today waste-pickers in Turkey continue to work as informal wage-labourers. For a more detailed class analysis of waste-pickers in the recycling market see Dinler (2016).

⁷ Katherine Millar's (2015) study of Brazilian garbage dump workers suggests that workers have similar reflections on the reasons behind price fluctuations.

⁸ This situation is different from Indian waste-pickers examined by Kaveri Gill (2007). In Delhi, Gill finds more binding and long-term exchange relations between dealers and waste-pickers who are subject to social stigma, preventing horizontal and vertical mobility.

⁹ This general legitimation is challenged by waste-picker organisers who point to structural inequalities in society and claim for the elimination of capitalist conditions which reproduce them as wage-labourers. This more radical discourse is used during times of protest by waste pickers while defending their right to work in the streets.

¹⁰ Official Communiqué on the Amendment of Official Communiqué 2006/7 on the goods whose export is conditional upon registration, Official Gazette, no 27912, date: 21.04.2011.

¹¹ Local paper producers complained that cheap and low quality imported paper (due to dumping prices as a result of the WTO requirements) had a negative effect on the price of local paper. *Dünya*, "Damping ve İthal Kağıttaki Artış Yerli Üretimi Zora Soktu", 14th January, 2014

¹² See Competition Board Decision, number: 13-42/538-238; date: 8th July 2013. The rule about the conditional export of waste paper was only removed on 1 June 2018 (Official Gazette 34308).

¹³ The situation is different for large Turkish metal factories some of whom use the LME to hedge their risks.

¹⁴ At the dump there are hierarchies between reclaimers from different nationalities who are allocated different shifts.

¹⁵ In Turkish the term 'market' refers to a shop or grocery store, a smaller version of a supermarket.

¹⁶ As Mauss (1924/1990: 104-105) argues, people who had no choice but to cooperate, and giving in tribal life could suddenly switch from battle to festival and vice versa.

¹⁷ See Browne (2004) for a case study from Martinique where many informal/illicit/illegal economic activities were considered to be the manifestation of cleverness, astuteness and achievement, a discourse emerging from a historically specific cultural universe shared by Martinique people from different class backgrounds.

¹⁸ In his case study of wealthy industrialists who come from the same natal town in Kayseri, Cengiz (2013) finds that, contrary to his own expectations that kinship bonds and solidarity networks would support business relations, industrialists did not exchange help or support to start, expand and maintain their business. On the contrary, they pointed to “envy” as a driving force behind individual success. Envy has a positive connotation in this context, because by “envying” the rival relative, one is motivated to set up business and/or work harder and with more ambition.

¹⁹ As Yüксеk (2003) indicates for the case of cross-border informal traders in Istanbul, trust relations could not be taken for granted to build the market; they could be broken and had to be rebuilt.

²⁰ I borrow the term from Zelizer (1988) who suggests making an empirical examination of a variety of historically changing markets associated with different values, behaviours and beliefs underpinned by structural factors. She investigates shifts between gift-type exchanges and impersonal markets, and the role of non-economic factors in shaping economic behaviour.

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